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President: Mr. Lester B. PEARSON (Canada).

Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly: memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/2206)

[Agenda item 50]

1. The PRESIDENT: The members of the General Assembly will recall that, at the sixth session, on the initiative of the delegation of Norway, five Members submitted a proposal [A/C.5/L.173] regarding the problem of limiting the duration of the regular sessions of the General Assembly. As a result of that proposal, the General Assembly decided [373rd meeting] to include this important matter in the provisional agenda of the present session, and it requested the Secretary-General to prepare a working paper as a basis for the Assembly's consideration of the matter. This working paper is before the General Assembly in the form of a memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/2206).

2. In his memorandum, the Secretary-General points out that, in accordance with the action taken during the sixth session, he has engaged in consultations on this subject with Governments of Member States, with permanent delegations and with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. I understand that these consultations have taken place not only in the form of requests for the written views of all Member States, but also through many detailed conversations held with members of permanent delegations during the months preceding our present session of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General has informed me that he has endeavoured to reflect in his memorandum the widest possible consensus of views and that the suggestions which he has put forward in that memorandum are those which reflect the main trends of thought on this matter among the members of the General Assembly. I think it is fair to say, therefore, that the document before the General Assembly represents a considered and realistic approach to this very important question.

3. As is known, it was decided by the General Assembly a few days ago [382nd meeting] that this question should be dealt with directly in plenary meeting, it being understood that amendments which the plenary meeting desired to make to the rules of procedure should

be reported to the Sixth Committee before final action was taken by the General Assembly, and also that the Fifth Committee should be given an opportunity of studying the effect that any proposal having budgetary consequences would have on the budget estimates.

4. The General Assembly, of course, will decide itself how to deal with this matter, but, in the hope that it may be of some help to the Assembly in coming to that decision, I should like to suggest that we might handle the matter in this way.

5. First, if it is so agreed, there might be a general discussion on the item now in plenary meeting, and that discussion could be based on the body of the Secretary-General's memorandum, which contains various suggestions of a general nature and which also indicates which rules of procedure might usefully be changed. It is to be hoped that during this general discussion the General Assembly will be able to reach provisional agreement on these general suggestions and on the rules of procedure which might be amended.

6. If it can, then at that stage, when general and provisional agreement has been reached, the plenary meeting could adjourn its consideration of this item in order to give the Fifth Committee time to consider any questions with budgetary implications and in order to allow the Sixth Committee to examine, in the light of the discussion at the plenary meetings of the General Assembly, the specific amendments to the rules of procedure which would be required. The Sixth Committee would have before it the amendments in the annex to this memorandum, together with any proposed amendments agreed upon in our plenary meetings.

7. If that is thought to be a suitable procedure, then the plenary meeting could take up this item again at a later date, after the Fifth and Sixth Committees had reported back to the General Assembly on the matters which were referred to them. With the report of these two committees, the General Assembly would then be in a position to take final decisions both on the general suggestions to which provisional agreement might have been given and on the specific amendments to the rules of procedure. The General Assembly could at that time also give consideration to the actual form

in which these final decisions under this item should be recorded.

8. If that procedure were acceptable to the General Assembly, that would complete the consideration of the item, with the possible exceptions of paragraphs 48 and 49 of the Secretary-General's memorandum. These two paragraphs deal with suggestions regarding the opening and closing dates of regular sessions, and I suppose that the General Assembly would not wish to take a final decision on them until considerably later in the session, when it would be in a better position to know what the effect has been on the present session of the postponement of the opening date of the session and the relation of that postponement to the duration of the session.

9. If this procedure which I have outlined, and which is merely a suggestion to the Assembly, should commend itself to you, then I would suggest that we should now begin the general discussion of the memorandum by the Secretary-General.

10. If no discussion is desired on this suggested procedure for dealing with this item on our agenda, we might proceed accordingly, and there will then be a general and, in a sense, a preliminary discussion of the memorandum by the Secretary-General. For that purpose, I call first on the representative of Norway.

11. Mr. ENGEN (Norway): The Norwegian delegation deems it appropriate to intervene briefly at this stage of the discussion of the item now before the Assembly because my delegation is in a way responsible for this item being brought up during this session.

12. When my delegation took the initiative at the end of the last session to have the Secretary-General study the problem of limiting the duration of the regular sessions of the General Assembly, we were moved mainly by the desire to find ways and means for the Assembly to perform its functions as efficiently and as expeditiously as possible by improving the rules of procedure when this seemed necessary and desirable, by improving established practice and procedure in the Assembly and in the committees, by applying the necessary amount of discretion when deciding on the agenda of the regular sessions and by other measures.

13. Having said this, I should also like to add this, that my delegation is of course aware of the fact that a mere change of the rules of procedure does not solve the problems which the length of the sessions pose for all of us who participate in them. We certainly must not lose sight of the overriding importance of maintaining the General Assembly of the United Nations as the world's most prominent forum of free discussion and negotiation, where the right of every member to express his opinions must be safeguard to the utmost degree. This, however, cannot justify any kind of complacency on the part of the members as regards the perfection of the rules of procedure and the practices now established. As far as my delegation is concerned, we do not think that our rules of procedure and our practices are perfect. They can be improved and we think they should be improved.

14. The memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General, which we now have before us, seems to my

delegation to present a sound and reasonable approach to the problem, and I should like, on behalf of my delegation, to pay a tribute to the Secretary-General and his staff for this helpful and valuable document which is a commendable result of co-operation between the Secretariat and the delegations.

15. I do not intend at this stage to go into the many specific suggestions, observations and proposals contained in the Secretary-General's memorandum. It is my understanding, as outlined by the President today, that a discussion will take place at a later stage. I should, however, like to associate myself very strongly with what the Secretary-General says in paragraphs 7 and 8 of his memorandum:

"7. There can be no doubt that the lengthening of the regular sessions, if due to inadequate procedures, does not add to the stature of the Assembly in the eyes of the world. But excessive length itself has disadvantages for the Assembly as well as for the Organization as a whole.

"8. The past tendency to prolong the General Assembly each year has made it difficult for governments to maintain the same delegations throughout an entire session. The Secretary-General appreciates that members of national governments and parliaments cannot be expected to be absent from their duties at home beyond a reasonable period of time. On the other hand, he is convinced that the work of the Assembly would benefit by the direct participation of leading statesmen, in so far as possible, at every stage of the deliberations. A greater continuity in the composition of delegations would have a favourable effect on the work of the General Assembly, and that continuity might be more easily attained if the duration of the regular sessions were more strictly limited."

16. This is an essential point. It certainly casts no reflection upon the permanent delegations to submit that we do not necessarily *ipso facto* fall within the category of "leading statesmen", as the Secretary-General terms it in his memorandum. I think that we all recognize the fact that one of the great advantages which the regular sessions offer to the Member States is that members of governments and of parliaments are able to come together and discuss the problems, to learn about them and preferably try to solve them, before a world forum which is different from the somewhat more limited perspectives seen from a rostrum in a national assembly or in the peaceful atmosphere of a department office room. And, even more important, it must be assumed that our deliberations will obtain added prestige, importance and responsibility by the presence of responsible politicians and members of governments. I therefore submit that it is of paramount importance for the Assembly to organize and perform its work in a manner and in a period of time which can preserve its character as the highest forum in world politics.

17. Regarding what we consider to be a reasonable period of time, I should like to say that it is the firm opinion of my delegation that the duration of the regular sessions should not exceed eight weeks. The previous sessions have shown that, unless special circumstances arise, the Assembly, with added facility and experience, should be able to discharge its duties in that period of time.

18. In this connexion, I should like to say a few words about the Secretary-General's suggestion, contained in paragraphs 43 to 46, inclusive, of his memorandum, that we should find a way to consider certain items between sessions. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's suggestion that the General Assembly might set up special *ad hoc* committees, with all the Member States participating, to deal with specific items between the sessions, items which the General Assembly either had decided to postpone to the following session or items which ordinarily would have been dealt with by special committees with limited membership. This procedure would make it possible to deal with the reports of such committees directly in the plenary meeting without referring them to one of the Main Committees during the regular session. My delegation feels that the Secretary-General's suggestion should be given very careful consideration.

19. Before I conclude, I should like to call the attention of the Assembly to what the Secretary-General says in paragraphs 27 and 28 of his memorandum about the debates in committees. Here the Secretary-General—in our opinion very rightly—points out that the Main Committees have a tendency to establish an increasingly rigid pattern of set procedures, which should be re-examined in order to expedite the business of the committees. What we have in mind is the now firmly established practice of moving through the debate in a series of stages, starting out with a general debate, followed by a debate on the proposal, then by a debate on amendments, then by someone using his right of reply and then, finally, by explanations of vote. We think that the committees should be able to follow a more flexible procedure.

20. In order to achieve this, we intend to submit a proposal for an additional article to the rules of procedure which would enable the Chairman or any member of a committee to take the initiative to adapt the procedure for the handling of items to circumstances and to the nature of the particular items under discussion. My delegation reserves its right to submit such a proposal, and possibly other proposals, to the Sixth Committee when the item comes up for discussion there. My delegation will also state its views more fully on the various aspects of the problems contained in this memorandum and its annex in connexion with the debate on the concrete proposals contained therein when the matter is discussed in the Sixth Committee.

21. Sir Gladwyn JEBB (United Kingdom): The report of the Secretary-General very properly lays emphasis, in the first place, on the need for the most effective use of the time of the General Assembly, and I think that we should all probably admit that, if it can, the Assembly should certainly try to avoid any useless and repetitive debate. We think that the Secretary-General is also to be commended for his careful and balanced approach to the problem of limiting the duration of sessions. In the view of the Government which I represent, I can say straight away that the proposals contained in his memorandum are generally acceptable to us. We are also very grateful—as I am sure all delegations are—to the delegation of Norway for having taken the initiative in this matter, an initiative which, as we now see, is obviously bearing fruit.

22. At the same time, we realize that any measures which are designed to shorten procedure and limit debate and which may have the effect of placing an increased burden on smaller delegations obviously must be acceptable to those delegations. Therefore, much as my own delegation would like to see most of the Secretary-General's suggestions adopted, we would not wish to press for their acceptance unless they were acceptable to delegations which are much smaller than ours. But it is also apparent that in preparing this memorandum the Secretary-General has taken into consideration the views of delegations, and certainly his proposals are cautious and modest.

23. The United Nations, as we all know, is a fairly young organization. No doubt with experience it will find ways and means of improving its own methods and procedures. We now have under consideration suggestions which, as I have said, if anything err on the cautious side. I think that some delegations would have preferred something rather more drastic, but it is obviously best in these matters to start slowly and to keep our methods and procedures under constant review, trying to improve them step by step.

24. Obviously, I do not want to detain the General Assembly for more than a few minutes on this topic of how to shorten our procedures and limit our debates, because it would be very paradoxical if I were to do otherwise, but there are one or two points which I should like to make.

25. One of the more important suggestions in the memorandum, in our view, is that the agenda should be carefully examined and pruned in order to avoid unnecessary debate. We think that the number of items on the agenda for sessions of the Assembly could be reduced, and that this would be one of the most effective ways, incidentally, of limiting the duration of sessions. It seems to us that at each session of this body the agenda tends to become longer and longer, so that the need for at least a careful review of our provisional agenda obviously increases year by year. Yet the very pressure of work and the shortage of time which make this review necessary also make it more and more difficult for the General Committee to carry out any such work in any but a most cursory way. It has been suggested in the past that this difficulty might be overcome by an agenda committee which would scrutinize the provisional agenda before the opening of each session. At any rate, if this suggestion for reducing the length of the agenda is to be taken seriously, some new step of some kind will be required to give effect to it. We think, therefore, that when he examines the methods and procedures of the Assembly in future, the Secretary-General might at least give careful attention—I shall not say more than that—to the possibility of establishing an agenda committee.

26. My second observation is that we cannot always assume that rules of procedure which are satisfactory for different and smaller bodies will necessarily be satisfactory for this General Assembly, and I have in mind here the proposed amendment to rules 74 and 114 mentioned in paragraph 35 of the memorandum. There is a risk, we think, that a strict application of the amendment proposed would result sometimes in the debate being closed before it had been barely opened, and that it might possibly also force delegations to

speak before they were really ready to do so or at some moment which they did not consider to be timely. If that were so, we think that it would simply involve renewed interventions at a later stage. Thus, in our view, this particular suggestion should be examined very carefully before it is incorporated definitely in our rules of procedure.

27. I should like also to sound a small note of caution about the proposal to provide for the simultaneous sitting of five Main Committees. If this could be done, it obviously would result in materially shortening our sessions, but we think that we should be assured that five simultaneous meetings could be held without placing an undue strain on delegations. Besides that, before finally approving this proposal—which, in principle, we think is acceptable—we should like, if we may, to have some estimate of its financial implications and to be assured that it would not entail any very costly additions to the staff of the Secretariat. I assume that the report will be referred in due course to the Fifth Committee, and that these financial implications will be examined there.

28. Finally, I should like to say just a few words about those paragraphs in the report which deal with the consideration of items between sessions. There is no doubt that there are sometimes occasions when valuable work can be done between sessions by some small *ad hoc* committees, as they are called. We have good examples of that in the two committees on methods and procedures which have met, as we know, in 1949 and 1952. But, in a general way, such committees are required to examine difficult and detailed problems which cannot easily be dealt with in any committee of sixty representatives. We do not wholly exclude the possibility of *ad hoc* inter-sessional committees of all Members, but, as we see it, the occasions on which there would be advantages in establishing such committees are likely to be pretty few and far between. In our view, it would be necessary to make out a very strong case indeed before referring any matter to such a committee. After all, we already have the permanent organs of the United Nations, whose duty it is to consider, for example, economic, social and trusteeship questions, and we do not think that anything should be done by the General Assembly itself to detract, or which might possibly detract, from the work of those organs.

29. In conclusion, as I have already said, notwithstanding these rather cautionary remarks, my delegation in general certainly favours this report, and I hope that it will be possible, after a short debate here, for the General Assembly to give it its general blessing, as I think the President himself has suggested, and then to refer the details to the appropriate committees, so that we shall soon have their reports and dispose finally and satisfactorily of this item.

30. Mr. ROBINSON (Israel): My delegation has given careful consideration to the memorandum by the Secretary-General on the subject now under discussion. We understand that other proposals of a procedural nature have been suggested by representatives of the Scandinavian States. My delegation wishes to pay tribute to their efforts in this respect, reference to which, it believes, might usefully have been made in the memorandum before the General Assembly. On the other hand, we fully understand the hesitancy of

the Secretary-General in his suggestions concerning such matters as the agenda and reports of Councils. We note that no other proposals than those of a purely procedural and minor character have so far been submitted for action by the General Assembly. At the same time we fully realize that the plenary meetings of the General Assembly are not the appropriate place for such discussions, particularly so if it is intended that the scope of our inquiry should go beyond the conventional rules of procedure. We therefore hope that there will be some other form in which these matters will be scrutinized in greater detail, and we would accordingly confine ourselves to observations of a general nature.

31. My delegation does not believe that the problem now on the agenda can be solved by purely technical methods. It is a political problem involving the functions, methods and activities of the General Assembly and it must, therefore, be solved within a broader framework. There are limits to improvements in the rules of procedure beyond which a union of States—if the United Nations can be so classified—cannot go. Basing itself as it does on the principle of sovereign equality, our Organization is limited in the procedural measures which it may invoke without in any way affecting this principle.

32. This conclusion regarding the insufficiency of purely procedural remedies is borne out by the actual experience of the United Nations in the application of its rules of procedure. At the third session of the General Assembly, there was an outcry against the length of the session, and a special committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Grafstrom of Sweden, reviewed the rules of procedure with the purpose of shortening the debates and sessions. In retrospect, with all due appreciation of the work of that committee, it can be said that probably only one of these rules really contributed to the shortening of the sessions, namely, the rule allowing the renewal of discussion in a plenary meeting only in the event that one-third of the members present and voting agreed to such a debate. However, this measure did not help much in shortening the period of sessions, since the real bottleneck is not in the plenary meetings, but in the committees.

33. In addition to some procedural deficiencies, the length of the sessions is due, *inter alia*, to the following six facts: first, the somewhat obscure relationship between the General Assembly and the other principal organs; secondly, the heavy emphasis, in the activities of the General Assembly, on its function as the "Town meeting of the world"; thirdly, the ease with which matters can be placed on the agenda; fourthly, the repetitiousness of items year after year; fifthly, the method of discussing practically all items on the agenda in full membership committees; and, finally, the lack of preparation in the inter-session period. I wish now to say a few words in explanation of each of these points.

34. Under the Charter and the rules of procedure, all principal organs of the United Nations submit reports to the General Assembly, with the exception of the International Court of Justice—rule 13 of the rules of procedure notwithstanding. But the method of dealing with these reports is different. Ironically enough, the report of the Security Council, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of interna-

tional peace and security, receives only perfunctory treatment. The same is true with regard to the report of the Secretary-General. Quite different is the situation with regard to the Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council, whose reports absorb dozens of meetings in three committees. While the desire of Members of the United Nations which are not members of these two Councils to have their say on questions within the jurisdiction of the two Councils is justified, there is no proof that any really important aspect of the problems has been neglected by the Councils and that the contribution of the General Assembly to the questions in their jurisdiction has been constructive or novel. In fact, it is just those governments which are already members of these Councils that are the most active also in the discussions in the committees of the General Assembly. I believe that a thorough study of this problem would serve to show that these repeated debates are of only limited value and that ways could be found for a radical revision in this area.

35. The temptation for States to bring to the General Assembly problems with which they are concerned, primarily because of the General Assembly's quality as an international sounding-board, and with little consideration for the practical usefulness of such a debate, has produced overcrowded agendas. Such procedures, in fact, reflect a misinterpretation of the functions of the United Nations in the international community. It is mistakenly assumed that the United Nations, with its so-called conference procedures, is a substitute for the traditional diplomatic methods of solving difficulties. This was not the early intention of the Charter of the United Nations. The United Nations was not envisaged as a substitute for diplomacy, but as a supplement to it. Unless this original conception of the United Nations is restored, there will be difficulties in resisting the bringing of new items to the agenda. On the other hand, it would seem that the fact that so many of these problems continually appear on the agenda without any sign of progress at all should have discouraged those who seek solutions only by way of mobilizing world opinion through the General Assembly. The inertia of these items on the agenda has become a source, and perhaps the main source, of the lengthening of the debates and the duration of the sessions.

36. The procedure taken over from the League of Nations, with its rule of unanimity—which, incidentally, is not followed by the United Nations—according to which all Main Committees are full-membership committees, must of necessity lengthen the duration of the Assembly. Whether this principle is really sacrosanct or whether some committee of limited membership could not do a great part of the work now being done by the Main Committees, is a question to which no attention, unfortunately, has been given so far. A study of the problem would reveal that this tradition must not necessarily be maintained in full and that therefore a shortening of the Assembly would be possible by the allocation of certain items to non-full-membership committees. There is no need to elaborate on the need for thorough preparation in the period between sessions.

37. What are the remedies for these six evils? In the first place, it would seem to us that a thorough study

of the problems involved in the General Assembly's methods of discussing the reports of the principal organs and the methods of referring problems to non-full-membership committees, should be undertaken by the Secretary-General. Secondly, the process of putting items on the agenda should be subject to certain restrictions, particularly to the one we might call the previous exhaustion of diplomatic methods. This is a principle somewhat analogous to the one which was recognized long ago in matters of international jurisdiction, where an international court would not start the consideration of a litigation unless all methods of national jurisdiction had been previously exhausted. An extension of a similar principle to the United Nations by political organizations would be useful. Thirdly, no item which has already been discussed in the Assembly should be brought before it again unless there are some reasonable prospects for progress in such discussions.

38. My delegation reserves its right to come back to practical proposals with respect to the methods of dealing with the problem, whether in the Sixth Committee, the Fifth Committee or in a special committee fully briefed by previous research undertaken by the Secretary-General.

39. Mr. GREEN (United States of America): The title of this item is, "Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly". I feel that the contents of this item are well summarized in paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's memorandum in which he states that an effort should be made to establish the procedures of the Assembly in such a way as to make "the best use of the time considered as reasonable for regular sessions". The effectiveness of the Assembly depends on its using its time efficiently, considering its agenda with care and making it possible for responsible governmental leaders to be present at our debates. This report analyses honestly these three problems.

40. The United States took part in informal meetings held with the Secretary-General and with Secretariat officials on this general subject. We see in this paper the general conclusions emerging from the differing views which were expressed during these consultations. Some of the concrete suggestions seemed to be more appealing than others. One or two of the ideas set out in the paper came from the United States.

41. It does not seem to me at all necessary to discuss in detail the points covered in the memorandum. The suggested changes in the rules of procedure will be before the Sixth Committee and will be examined with care at that time. The suggestion contained in paragraph 47 for the scheduling of additional meetings of Main Committees and the payment of travel expenses for two additional members will be before the Fifth Committee. There, its financial implications will be examined. Naturally, the cost of these suggestions will have a very direct bearing on the decision which my delegation will finally reach on this particular suggestion.

42. Flexibility in procedure is, I feel, desirable, particularly in the early development of the General Assembly, which is part of a comparatively new organization. It is good to see the experiment which our discussion this morning represents, of debating certain

agenda items directly in the plenary meeting. It seems to me that our Main Committees will want to guard carefully the flexibility of their procedure. In this connexion, the comments contained in paragraphs 27 and 28 of the Secretary-General's memorandum seem particularly appropriate, to the effect that no hard and fast stages should be developed in the handling of agenda items.

43. The memorandum before us is not intended to be a definitive study or report on Assembly procedures. A critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the Assembly in conducting its business must be a continuing process. This memorandum is a helpful analysis of the conclusions arrived at after the expression of different points of view. It covers questions that Members of the United Nations will want to have under continuing study.

44. My delegation is glad to indicate its general support for this formulation and synthesis of the wide consultations which the Secretary-General and his staff have conducted during recent months.

45. Sir Percy SPENDER (Australia): The Australian delegation desires in the first place to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the memorandum which he has circulated. As the President has said, it deals with an important subject matter designed better to use the time of the Assembly and its committees in the various important matters we are called upon to decide. It seems to us that the matter is correctly expressed by the Secretary-General when he says that it is not so much a question of saving time; our purpose is to use the time which we have to the best advantage to discuss all the important international questions which come before us.

46. Australia sees the problem in two compartments: first, the general proposal to limit the period of debate; secondly, alterations of procedural rules so as to facilitate debate. As to the first matter, it is our considered view that in the Assembly we ought not to seek to put definite limits upon the period of debate. I think that the representative of the United Kingdom fairly acknowledged the position with regard to smaller countries in this Assembly. We all know that, in many of the agencies of the United Nations, the great Powers play a dominant part. I think it is not improper to say that that dominant part is showing a tendency to insert itself into this Assembly. This Assembly is the forum in which all nations, and in particular the small nations, have a right to have their voices heard. For our part, we are completely opposed to any attempt to limit the period of debate. Our purpose is rather to use the time to better advantage.

47. Having said that, may I make some observations of a general character on procedural questions. We do not place any great faith in the proposition that by altering the rules of procedure we are likely to get at the heart of this problem. It is true that certain procedural alterations may help us, but unless each nation, in the first place, accepts the responsibility for using its time for the proper debate of subject matters without repetition, and without the desire merely to obtain some special advantage, and unless the presiding officers are prepared to exercise their authority, then we are not likely to make much progress merely by altering the rules.

48. A further point which I think calls for comment is this: it is our belief that the General Assembly and its committees should, as a matter of practice, uphold the presiding officers. This means that, although there may be some aspect of a chairman's viewpoint with which individual delegations do not thoroughly agree, nonetheless, unless a matter of substance is involved, the Chair ought to be upheld. I may be forgiven for making some observations about the fact that, despite the nature of the agenda which was before the First Committee yesterday [510th meeting]—there were only about seven or eight items—it took about three and a half hours to determine the order in which they should be considered. I do not imagine that the prestige of this Organization will be greatly enhanced if we have a repetition of such performances.

49. Having said that, could I invite the attention of the General Assembly to more detailed matters which appear in the report of the Secretary-General. It is not our purpose to go into detail on all the items that appear therein, as we approve the President's suggestion that this memorandum, after the debate on it in the General Assembly, should be referred to the Fifth and Sixth Committees. But there are some items concerning which these committees may be aided in their consideration if our views are expressed now.

50. The first item is the question of the agenda. The agenda appears from year to year to increase in size because of the reintroduction of old items and the introduction of new ones, some of which are a repetition of matters either already considered by the General Assembly or already on the agenda. The General Committee, under rules 40 and 41 of the rules of procedure, has a very broad authority which, if exercised, would, I believe, greatly facilitate our discussions and eliminate the wasting of time. Our view is that these powers of recommendation contained in rules 40 and 41 should be exercised more often and, unless we have a real matter of substance which we desire to have argued (as distinct from a mere feeling that we could do a better job) the practice of the General Assembly ought to be to accept the recommendation. By the time some of the items are reached, such as some of these compendious resolutions, everyone knows that they will not be debated because they have already been dealt with under special items on the agenda and no further real debate is necessary.

51. Similar considerations, it appears to us, apply to the reports called for by the General Assembly. Often such reports could be considered by the Members themselves without the necessity for further General Assembly discussions. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 17 of his report, has made a very worthwhile suggestion, namely, that the situation would be clarified if the practice were adopted of stating in the resolution whether it was intended that the report should be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration or only to Members for their information. In the first case, the item would be included automatically in the provisional agenda of the following session. In the second, it would not. I think that proposal is a good one; but may I make a suggestion which I think could improve it. I think that, as a rule, reports made in pursuance of a General Assembly resolution ought not to be placed upon the agenda at all unless some nation itself moves that it should be so placed, in which event

it would go before the General Committee under rules 40 and 41, and a decision would be made accordingly. In other words, I think that a report, unless the General Assembly, in its resolution, says specifically that it is intended to be placed upon the agenda of the next session, ought not to go there. It should be left to some particular member so to move, if he thinks that a matter of substance is involved which ought to receive the consideration of the General Assembly.

52. The next subject matter on which I should like to make a few observations is that of debates in committees. These tend to follow the pattern of a general discussion, followed by the consideration, section by section, of proposals submitted to the committee. The Secretary-General, in his report, has drawn attention to the serious abuses—he does not use that word, but it is the word which I use—which can take place in the procedure followed in committee proceedings. In paragraph 27 he makes this general and very restrained observation:

“The tendency has grown automatically to observe independent and succeeding stages with respect to each item on the agenda—a general debate on the item, followed by debates on specific proposals, further debates on amendments and still others under the right of reply and the explanation of vote. This formal segmentation often provokes duplication of speeches and increases, as well, the risk of engaging in protracted procedural discussions.”

I am sure that this comment will receive the support of every representative here. I am sure that we shall also agree that it is a masterly piece of understatement.

53. Australia has a particular interest in the suggestion that those representatives who intervene in the general discussion of a subject should not thereafter be permitted to explain their votes. In our view, an explanation of vote should be restricted to those who, not having intervened in a debate, have some genuine purpose in explaining why they vote one way or another. As the matter stands, the right in the rules of procedure to explain one's vote has been used too often as a pretext for further intervention after debate has closed. We hope, when this is dealt with in committee, that some provision will be included to prevent this from taking place.

54. While we adhere to the proposition that the freedom of representatives to discuss matters before the General Assembly should not be unduly restricted, we agree that the possibility of limiting debate on matters should be considered by the General Assembly in any revision of its rule or procedure. As is customary, I believe, in most of the parliaments of the world, the Chair might be accorded the power to rule out irrelevant or repetitious comment. There is a way in which the Chair's ruling can always be challenged. It can be challenged by a vote which must be taken at once without further argument. One would, I believe, improve very much the rules and the conduct of our proceedings if some such authority were clearly vested in the presiding officer both in the General Assembly and in the committees. It would be a power which would not be often exercised, but it could be exercised, provided the President or chairman were prepared to do so where this was desirable in the interests of Member nations as a whole.

55. Something was said by the representative of the United Kingdom with regard to proposals on the closing of the list of speakers. I can appreciate the observations which he made and, in part, I agree with him. It would be our hope that some definite procedure might be evolved to make it possible to close the list of speakers at an appropriate moment. After the debate had really exhausted itself and an opportunity had been given to all members to speak, if they so desired, the debate could be brought to an end by closing the list of speakers.

56. Only two other matters remain for comment by the Australian delegation. The first is that of points of order. I think it is correct to say, as the Secretary-General has said, in paragraph 36 of his report, that “few rules have given rise to greater difficulty and to more frequent misapplication than rules 72 and 112, which relate to points of order”. The Australian delegation fully supports the proposal which has been made that all points of order should be clearly limited to matters which can properly be raised under the rules—to which, of course, they should always be limited—namely, to those matters which fall within the competency of the chairman. The mere passing of this amendment will not, however, carry the matter very far if the chairman himself does not exercise his authority. I am sure that we have all had the experience, on more than one occasion, of seeing points of order raised and no ruling given upon them. The result then is that the debate gets completely out of hand. It makes possible interventions which are not designed to assist in the debate and, consequently, the rules of procedure are abused. Therefore we support the proposal which has been advanced by the Secretary-General.

57. My only other observation deals with the question of attempting to consider items on the agenda of the General Assembly between sessions. We do not believe that it would be possible to give such questions the expert consideration between sessions which we can give them during sessions of the General Assembly, because of the presence of experts from the particular countries. Moreover, in the case of most of us, the size of our permanent delegations precludes their engaging in much more work than they already do. We feel that it should be possible for the General Assembly so to organize itself as to dispose of its business within a reasonable period annually. We feel quite strongly that any attempt to have some *ad hoc* consideration of items between sessions of the General Assembly will impose a very difficult burden upon small countries with small delegations, of which Australia is one. Therefore we cannot give support to that proposal.

58. We welcome the opportunity which has been given to us on this occasion to make these observations. Of course, we reserve the right, which we shall exercise, of expressing further views in detail in the Fifth and Sixth Committees.

59. Mr. LACOSTE (France) (*translated from French*): As the object of our debate this morning is to limit the duration of sessions of the General Assembly, I feel that it is my duty to make my personal contribution towards that end. I shall therefore be very brief. The French Government believes that shorter sessions of the Assembly might be more effective.

It will therefore support any reasonable and judicious measures to limit the duration of regular sessions. It considers in particular that if the opening date of sessions were changed from the third Tuesday in September to the second Tuesday in October, the Assembly might be in a position to reduce the average length of sessions to two months, while giving the Secretariat more time to prepare and circulate the required documents within the prescribed time limits. The French delegation thinks that the excellent memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General on this subject forms a good basis for the examination of this whole problem in committee. It will therefore vote in favour of referring the report to the Sixth Committee for study.

60. Mr. SANTA CRUZ (Chile) (*translated from Spanish*): The report before us is the outcome of an agreement reached in the Fifth Committee to ask that appropriate studies should be made and proposals submitted, in due course, for the improvement of the methods and procedures of the General Assembly and its committees. Although the agreement was prompted by the well-justified financial preoccupations of the members of the Committee, I believe that the Secretary-General has based his suggestions on sound principles, as we can see from paragraphs 5 and 6 of his memorandum which read:

"5. The best interests of the General Assembly, not the length of its sessions as such, must remain the over-riding consideration. It should also be kept in mind that the Assembly has special characteristics which distinguish it from other more homogeneous parliamentary bodies; its processes are largely conditioned by the wide scope of its purposes and defined by the very nature of its composition. Furthermore, the question under review cannot be judged solely on technical grounds or on grounds of efficiency. The length of the regular sessions of the Assembly has been determined mainly by the complexity and number of the international problems which have been brought to its attention as the result of differences among the Members, and by the atmosphere of deep-seated international tension in which the Assembly's discussions have taken place.

"6. It follows, therefore, that if the General Assembly of the United Nations is to fulfil the high responsibilities placed upon it by the Charter, and if the peoples of the world are to look with increasing respect and confidence to that body as the highest forum of the international community, all questions relating to the manner in which it functions must be considered primarily from the standpoint of their effect on the General Assembly as a whole. It is in the context of this appraisal that the Secretary-General recommends that an effort should be made to establish the procedures of the Assembly in such a way as to increase their effectiveness by making the best use of the time considered as reasonable for regular sessions. He is convinced that the prestige, dignity and authority of the Assembly would be enhanced by such an effort and he believes that measures can be taken which will prove the effort a fruitful one."

61. I fully agree with the principles on which the report is based. The Secretary-General is right in considering that a sense of the high mission of the Assem-

bly and the need for scrupulous respect of the inalienable right of Member States to express their views freely, without any kind of pressure or any restriction other than the rights of others, must take precedence over financial or technical considerations. I believe that in certain sectors the drive for economy has gone to such lengths as to indicate a certain disregard for the United Nations—disregard for its work, for the dignity of the officers of its principal organs and for the dignity of high officials. During the last two years, great efforts have been made to establish rigid ceilings for the budget for the economic and social activities of the United Nations, and during the last few days we have witnessed the sorry spectacle of a Committee composed of representatives of sixty nations, holding high positions in their respective countries, devoting itself to discussion of whether the United Nations should have two or six cars, in a city like New York, with its special transport difficulties, where there are millions of vehicles. If we are incapable of understanding that the United Nations stands for something more than a business house or a bank, there is little hope that the United Nations will have any real influence on the maintenance of peace and the progress of mankind.

62. The Secretary-General has made some sensible suggestions for curtailing the duration of the sessions, while respecting freedom of discussion and the rights of delegations, and I am in general agreement with those suggestions. I feel, however, that we must not expect too much of these measures. I agree with the Israel representative that procedural measures will not lead to very effective results, and that results will be more effectively achieved if the present political situation improves and if the methods of work of the delegations are improved, and if chairmen conduct the debates in a suitable manner, that is, by seeing to it above all that the rights of minorities are respected. I also believe that our main concern must be the attainment of the objectives of the United Nations and that the desirability of saving time and money must take second place.

63. The representatives of Israel and the United Kingdom referred to the question of the reports of the Councils. I would draw attention to the fact that the Secretary-General has been very cautious in making suggestions on this subject, and has been especially careful not to interfere with the rights of the General Assembly with regard to the Councils. I feel that we cannot go further than the suggestions made by the Secretary-General.

64. I believe that it is perhaps one of the most important functions of the Assembly to judge and discuss the work of its permanent organs, in which a minority of countries represent the whole Organization. In the case of the Economic and Social Council, which, under Article 60 of the Charter, works under the authority of the General Assembly, it is the duty of the Assembly not only to review the work of the Council but also to provide guidance for its future work.

65. I entirely disagree with the Israel representative's statement that the majority of the members of the Assembly have not taken a leading, or even an important, part in the discussion of the report of the Economic and Social Council. In recent years, members of the Council have not been the only representatives to participate in the Assembly's discussions. It is pre-

cisely because of the different composition of the majorities and minorities in the Assembly as compared with those in the Council, and their more progressive outlook, that the Assembly has been able to guide the Economic and Social Council towards more advanced, more progressive solutions.

66. I do not intend at this stage to discuss in detail the various amendments to the rules of procedure proposed by the Secretary-General. I support the President's suggestion that the matter should be referred to the Sixth Committee, so that it may proceed with the necessary revision of the rules. My delegation will express its views on each of the proposed amendments at that stage.

67. Mr. RODRIGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) (*translated from Spanish*): For the third time in a very short period this Assembly is laying aside the fundamental problems with which it is concerned in order to study a further revision of its rules of procedure. On previous occasions, the item referred specifically to that point and was worded in very general terms: "Amendment of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly". The item submitted to us now, which we have to discuss in plenary meeting, is more specific, more precise and more definite. It is "Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly". That means that if it is really necessary still further to limit the length of certain discussions, we are gathered here this morning to spend our time trying to find the best way of not losing it. I have no doubt that when world public opinion learns of our repeated attempts, in the Assembly, to limit, to restrict, to curtail the length or the number of speeches from this rostrum or in committee, it will gather the impression that our General Assembly—which is its own, since it is the world forum where the ideas, experience and hopes of all the nations of the earth can be expressed—meets periodically without considering either the time which must be spent in discussion or the time needed to solve our problems.

68. We must admit that the General Assembly of the United Nations, in itself and as a body representing all mankind, has its own, essential and, I might say, specific characteristics which set it apart and remove it from the scope of any of the usual definitions which can be applied to other representative bodies throughout the world. The Charter under which the United Nations was created intended it so. The Charter, which we must obey and respect, so indicates in Chapter IV, in which it makes the Assembly the most representative of all the organs of the United Nations. The Charter so intended when it laid down the composition of the Assembly. The Charter intends, indicates, defines and proclaims this when it establishes the almost unlimited functions and powers of the General Assembly, which can deal with any of the matters within the scope of the United Nations, as is laid down in clear and broad terms in Articles 10 and 11 of the Charter.

69. The governments are members of the Assembly and send their delegations to it. When a delegation speaks on behalf of its government and its people in the Assembly on subjects connected with the tremendous problems of the world, it is making its government and its people's contribution to the better service of the highest interests of mankind. Consequently, in

view of the specific and special characteristics of the Assembly on the one hand and of the provisions and definitions of the Charter on the other, no amendment of the rules of procedure which, in order to save time—measurable in minutes—would sacrifice a single principle of the Charter or any of the rights of a government to state its views in plenary meeting or in committee, will receive the affirmative vote of the delegation which I have the honour to represent on this rostrum.

70. We heard a number of very important statements this morning, some of them a little alarming. We know what type of reform we are dealing with. A few years ago, the Assembly appointed a Special Committee on Methods and Procedures of the General Assembly [*resolution 271 (III)*]. I had the honour to serve on that Committee, to take part in its twelve months' work, to discuss its report and, later, to participate in the debate in the Assembly. I may claim therefore that I can contribute to this debate some knowledge and experience of the process of amending rules of procedure, a process with which we are faced again before we have had sufficient time to test the results of the last revision. I shall therefore contribute that experience to this debate, as well as the views of my delegation.

71. The Secretary-General, as he states in the excellent memorandum which we have before us, consulted the permanent delegations. It is always a pleasure and an honour for me to discuss with the Secretary-General matters which vitally affect the life and interests of our international Organization. When, as the Secretary-General states in his memorandum, he addressed a communication on 1 August 1952 to the permanent representatives of Members, my delegation gave its oral comments immediately, along the same lines as the comments I am now making from this rostrum.

72. We have before us a revision of the rules of procedure which has, there can be no doubt, involved the sacrifice of many principles, in the hope that the sacrifice would be offset by increased efficiency. All the rules referred to by the Secretary-General are included in the annex to his memorandum, and I would ask my colleagues to consult the annex, in which they will find the suggestions and observations, reduced to the form of specific provisions, which the Secretary-General submits to this Assembly in his memorandum. For example, if we take rules 73 and 113, or rules 75 and 115, or rules 76 and 116, we shall see how the previous revision is being revised.

73. Under the previous revision, the Assembly was given the power to close the debate, to declare that items had been sufficiently discussed and to limit the time allowed to speakers. At that time I strongly opposed, as a matter of principle, the granting of such almost discretionary, almost absolute, power, to the President of the Assembly or the chairmen of committees. That was understandable. The General Assembly is the master of its own debates; it alone should be responsible for deciding the duration of its debates; the community of delegations must be the master of its fate and of its decisions.

74. Our President—and I am addressing one of the most admired Presidents and, if I may say so, one of the best loved representatives here—our Organization

and we ourselves have always avoided conferring discretionary powers on the chairmen of these bodies to which we come, not as individuals to state our own views, but as representatives of sovereign governments, to express the views of those sovereign governments, which in turn are the interpreters of the will of the peoples they represent under the democratic system.

75. I am unable now, as I was before, to accept the almost discretionary powers which the new amendments would confer on the President of the Assembly or the chairmen of committees, and I make so bold as to say that I can neither accept nor vote here for organs or institutions or procedures which have been abolished in my own country in the interests of democracy. I do not believe that the President's authority can be based on the wide powers contained in the new amendments. Our President is here to preside over the debates. That is why we elect him. He should not be given the power to limit speeches on his own authority, to close the debate at any stage of the proceeding or to give the floor to speakers, deciding how long and in what order they may speak, because that would be largely tantamount to giving him the power to influence the debate itself by deciding that such and such points of view might be set forth in the early stages of a long discussion of questions of principle.

76. Neither the regulations governing the legislature of my country nor the Constitution itself, which has just abolished not only all excessive presidential powers, but the very institution of the presidency itself, replacing it by a collegiate body, would authorize me to vote here for institutions or procedures discontinued in my own country by the will of the people and in the name of the democratic system under which we live.

77. I was therefore somewhat disturbed this morning when I heard the representative of the United Kingdom, in particular, say he thought that these were cautious amendments, which might be followed by others. Where are these limitations to end, if the provisions which are considered cautious—and I address myself particularly to colleagues who are, like myself, the representatives, not of great Powers, but of countries in the same category as my own—if provisions which are considered cautious at this point—and I have tried to put the substance of the memorandum in precise terms—involve measures which would authorize the closure of debates even if the representatives of Member States have manifested a desire to express the views of their governments? Can this be considered a prudent reform? And, above all, can it be considered a reform in keeping with law? Yet further, can it be held that a reform of this kind, which silences the representatives of sovereign governments at any point in the debate, will succeed in increasing the authority and the prestige of the United Nations General Assembly? I do not think that reforms which might lead to further limitations can be described as prudent. We are deliberative bodies. It is true that our agenda is increasingly long and increasingly heavy at every session. But I wonder if that is an evil. Is it an evil, or a disadvantage, or a defect that an ever-increasing number of problems appears on the agenda of the Assembly? Is it unfortunate that peoples from all over the world are having recourse to the General Assembly when they believe that their own rights are at stake, or when they aspire to raise their economic standards

in order to reach that stage of development which is in keeping with the dignity of the human person? I think, on the contrary, that this situation is a sufficient fulfilment of the hopes of the authors of the Charter, whom we might call the constituent assembly of San Francisco, when they founded our Organization on the principles enunciated in the Charter, which has become the law of the world.

78. I hope that nobody will think that I am advocating no time limits, interminable debates and speeches, Assembly sessions that never end. I have no such intention. But we should avoid falling into either of the two extremes. I venture to say that the loss, limitation or total abolition of a right is always the worst solution. Accordingly I do not think that the time is ripe for this revision. Ecclesiastes said that there was a time for everything, but this is not the time for this revision, when we are here in our new building, starting our work in it, and have already found that some of the means of saving time advocated in the new proposals have already been successful, thanks to the operation and installation of the Organization in our new permanent New York Headquarters. In previous years, much time was certainly lost in travelling out to Lake Success or Flushing. The meetings can now begin within a few minutes of the specified time. That means a saving of time, and there will be gains in other aspects of our work in the new building; but let us at least have the opportunity to try the new conditions. My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for his endeavours to organize our work, but we think that the matter should be the subject of further, more detailed and concrete study.

79. My delegation will vote in favour of the President's suggestion that the matter should be submitted to both the Fifth and Sixth Committees. My delegation will be prepared to give detailed study to the proposed amendments to our rules of procedure in committee, but not at the present stage.

80. Mr. MUNRO (New Zealand): My delegation, like those which have preceded it, finds itself in substantial agreement with the memorandum by the Secretary-General and we are indebted to him for that report.

81. We are also impressed with the suggestion by the representative of the United Kingdom that there should be an agenda committee. There is obviously some need to ensure that the provisional agenda does not have an excessive number of items on it—items which should not find their place there. We do raise the question, however, as to how an agenda committee will be able effectively to do its work, and that question does require some further examination. It may well be that such a committee would have some scope for its activities if we had regard to the provisions or to the matters mentioned in paragraphs 16 and 17 of the Secretary-General's memorandum. In paragraph 16, the Secretary-General says that he "believes that the General Assembly should in future indicate clearly its intentions in drafting resolutions calling for the preparation of special or annual reports". In paragraph 17, the Secretary-General goes on to say that "the situation would be clarified if the practice were adopted of stating in the resolution whether it is intended that the report should be submitted to the General Assembly for con-

sideration or to Members for their information". The provisions of those two paragraphs could be some guide to an agenda committee in the kind of work which it might usefully have to do.

82. Then I come to the suggestion for the setting up of an *ad hoc* committee. That, it appears to my delegation, would be a useful innovation. We do not think that such a committee should be envisaged as a permanent institution. The procedure we contemplate is that the General Assembly would fix a suitable date for the termination of the session, which, unless some critical situation intervened, should be rigidly adhered to. That may be a counsel of perfection, but I do suggest it. Any matters not dealt with by that time should be referred to an *ad hoc* committee of the whole, which would be established as required shortly before the terminal date of each session. It may be that the committee could also be used for a certain amount of preparatory work in advance of the following session. I admit that this would depend very much on the type of subject referred to it, and on the whole we think that its main usefulness would lie in dealing with matters left over from a session.

83. I come then to a point which does concern the representatives of small countries like my own. If the majority of members are in favour of holding five simultaneous meetings of the committees, we of course would do our best to conform. But there is a very real difficulty, as has been mentioned by one or two previous speakers, for the delegations of small countries in complying with that suggestion. In any case, we can by no means be sure that the suggestion would lead to the shortening of a session. The work programme of the Assembly is not evenly distributed among all committees, and some of them usually complete their work before others.

84. I have listened with interest this morning to the eloquent remarks about the imposition of a time limit on speeches. It is a common illusion of public speakers that their speeches should be long, an illusion sometimes encouraged by the public. As a former journalist, I can assure my fellow representatives that the illusion is a misleading one, and speaking here as the representative of a small country, I see no reason why there should not be a time limit on speeches, whether those speeches are delivered by representatives of the great Powers or of the small Powers. It is a matter of doubt that any speech is so important that no time limit should be fixed on it, and I seriously doubt whether we would suffer in this Assembly by having a time limit of, I shall say, an hour imposed on our speeches. If there is some provision for extension, then we could have it in the rules; and then the rule should be strictly applied.

85. I say also that there should unquestionably be some limit imposed on the time given for explanations of vote. As a newcomer to the work of this Assembly and its committees, I have been astounded at the length of speeches delivered in explanations of vote. Instead of saying briefly why a delegation has voted for proposition A or proposition B, these explanations often contain elaborate disputations, rhetorical questions and appeals to the conscience of mankind. There has also been the widest possible abuse of the privilege of explaining a vote.

86. The suggestion about selecting a principal sponsor to speak to multipartite proposals is, in our view, a good one. We think that the increasing tendency to associate a large number of sponsoring Powers, all of whose representatives make introductory speeches to a proposal, is unfortunate and should be checked.

87. I now pass on to the suggestion made for the more specific use of a general debate in the plenary meetings. That might meet some points which have been advanced in the course of this discussion. There would certainly be time saved if we did not have speeches made in this Assembly and then have them repeated, as they so often are, in our committees. We support also the use of the plenary meeting to deal with selected items direct and for the general discussion of the council's reports.

88. Finally, with some trepidation, I come to the question of punctuality. Punctuality is a somewhat pedestrian subject to mention to so august an assembly as this, and under the presidency of Mr. Pearson there has undoubtedly been punctuality. However, I have taken part in the deliberations of some subsidiary bodies of this Organization, and the leisurely way in which the preliminary discussions are held and the lapse of time before the meeting is called to order is something which is not worthy of very much praise.

89. Like the delegations which have preceded me, my delegation reserves the right to speak on the matters raised in this most valuable report in the Fifth and Sixth Committees.

90. Mr. TOUS (Ecuador) (*translated from Spanish*): The delegation of Ecuador, jointly with other delegations, proposed the inclusion of the item on measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly in the provisional agenda of this session. In doing so, the delegation of Ecuador had in mind the series of delays and procedures impairing the efficiency of the United Nations, with regard to which all delegations were agreed and which persisted despite the amendment of the rules of procedure.

91. The delegation of Ecuador shares with those of Chile and Uruguay the serious concern which all small countries must feel for the freedom to express their opinions fully. Nevertheless, it considers that the full expression of opinion, be it by large nations or small, in no way conflicts with that efficient and proper conduct of debates which is necessary precisely in order to ensure that the results are satisfactory and as acceptable as possible to the various delegations. In this way—by giving due consideration to each item, but only the attention which is strictly necessary and essential—will it be possible to include more items and thus make the work of the entire Organization much more fruitful.

92. After studying the amendments proposed by the Secretary-General, my delegation has no hesitation in approving them without reservation, because it does not find in them any measure impairing the dignity of the Assembly or of any of its committees, or any measure limiting debate as such. The object of the measures is to set a fair limit, to enclose within reasonable bounds a right of speech which has often been misused; such misuse has resulted in digressions which we have frequently and unanimously had occasion to deplore, and has restricted our opportunities for dealing with a

greater number of items. I believe that only a careful and detailed study of the new proposals and of the conditions existing heretofore will enable us to ascertain whether the amendments suggested by the Secretary-General are worth adopting and whether or not they affect the right of the various delegations to be duly represented in the General Assembly and in the various committees.

93. I think it unnecessary to enumerate, as some speakers have done, the defects which the proposed amendments are intended to correct, for they are only too obvious. Let us therefore examine the amendments to see how they affect the dignity of the Assembly and full freedom of expression in that organ.

94. In paragraph 1 of the annex to the Secretary-General's memorandum, we find the following: "The President or any representative may move the limitation . . .". As it now stands, rule 73 does not specifically state with whom the initiative lies. The only change proposed is that, instead of having recourse to representatives, the President should himself move the limitation of the time allowed to each speaker and decide how many times each speaker may take the floor on the same subject. Further on—and this is a real amendment—we read: "In addition to the proposer of the motion, two representatives may speak in favour of, and two against, the motion, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote". The unamended rule 73 provides, *inter alia*: "The General Assembly may limit the time to be allowed to each speaker . . .". The Assembly's right to fix a time limit has not been impaired in any way, because a vote will be taken to decide whether or not such a limit shall be imposed.

95. The effect of the amendments proposed in paragraph 1 is merely to prevent a situation where, when a proposal is made to limit the time allowed to speakers, all sixty representatives proceed to speak on it two or three times each with frequent digressions, a sin of which all of us have at some time been guilty. Thus no attempt is being made to limit the number of speeches; the objective is to establish an effective procedure for shortening a lengthy debate when the President, for example, or a representative, feels that it should be shortened. It is simply a matter of adopting some speedy procedure, differing from the procedure which governs debates on substance. The need for such a procedure has already been recognized. We have, for example, a precedent in rule 23, concerning the debate on the inclusion of an item in the agenda, of which our experience has been most instructive and most relevant to the situation we are now considering.

96. If the President were to make such a proposal at an inopportune time, he would, of course, be overruled by the Assembly. And I am sure that no President will run the risk of being thus overruled by the Assembly two or three times. Thus the issue is not the limitation of intervention as such, whether by the President or by any representative. Let us note that it is not the President alone who is involved. The amendment refers to "The President (Chairman) or any representative . . .". Once the limitation has been moved, only two representatives may speak in favour, and two against, in order to ensure that the procedural discussion will not be as lengthy as the discussion of the substance of the question, as has been the case in

the past. It is proposed that the number of speakers should be limited just as it is in a debate on the inclusion of an item in the agenda, in order to prevent a repetition of what happened a few days ago, when we heard, not three speakers, but twenty, twenty-five or thirty speakers. In other words, the aim is that a debate on a proposal for limiting the time allowed should not take up as much time as the discussion of the substance of the question. Obviously, this is a procedural matter, and is therefore of secondary importance, and, as such, should be handled expeditiously under a procedure similar to that established for the debate on the inclusion of an item in the agenda of the General Assembly. The only difference is that in matters governed by rule 23, three speakers may take part in the debate, whereas in the proposal we are considering only two may take the floor. In this connexion, the Ecuadorean delegation feels that the latter number may perhaps be too small, although there is no doubt that some limit must be placed on the number of speakers. Let us say that three, and not two, speakers may take the floor, so that the principal regions of the world may be able to state their views on the motion either of the President or of a representative of any one of the Member States. We think that in the present case the best thing might perhaps be to permit three speakers in favour of and three against the motion. But we are convinced of the need to establish more expeditious procedure. We consider that the Assembly should not hesitate to adopt this first paragraph, because it is not a question of depriving speakers of their right to intervene once, twice or three times in the debate on the substance of the question, but simply of fixing a limit once the debate has reached a point at which the President of the Assembly, the chairman of a committee or any representative feels the time has come to move the limitation of the debate. If we agree that such a motion can be made, we should establish the procedure, decide whether only two representatives—we suggest three—may speak in favour of, and a like number against, the motion, after which it should immediately be put to the vote. The decision will be left for the Assembly or the committee concerned. Thus the right to limit the debate which the General Assembly at present enjoys under rule 73 is not affected in any way. We should not conjure up phantoms where none exist.

97. As regards paragraph 2 of the annex to the memorandum, which relates to rule 75 (115), all that is proposed is that the President (Chairman), and not only "any representative", may move the adjournment of the debate. Under rule 75 in its existing form, this may be done by a representative only. We are all very well aware that, if the President wishes to introduce such a motion, he can do so through a representative, because he will find one of the sixty delegations willing to sponsor the motion as an act of courtesy or respect to himself. And I would venture to say that not only must we take this step out of deference, out of elementary courtesy, to the President, but also that, by allowing the President to move the adjournment of the debate, we should in no way restrict our own rights.

98. The same amendment is proposed to rules 76 and 116. What I have just said about paragraph 2 of the annex to the memorandum is therefore also applicable to paragraph 3.

99. The purpose of the amendment proposed in paragraph 4 is merely to compel delegations to prepare their speeches in good time and to prevent the reopening of a debate in one form or another after all the speakers on the list have spoken. This means that when the list of speakers is prepared, those wishing to intervene in the debate should signify their desire to do so in good time, so that when the list of speakers is exhausted, it will be clear that the debate has been concluded. That is why it is proposed that the following should be added to articles 74 and 114: "When the debate on an item has been concluded because there are no other speakers, the President (Chairman) shall declare the debate closed. Such closure shall have the same effect as closure by the consent of the General Assembly (Committee)." In other words it will no longer be necessary to leave the question unsettled. After that, a delegation cannot decide to intervene in order to put forward further arguments or to exert pressure with a view to prolonging the debate on an item, with the result that other items are relegated to the background and cannot be discussed at the proper time. On the contrary, all delegations wishing to intervene in the debate will have to enter their names on the list of speakers in good time, in order to ensure that the debate on the item in which they are interested may continue.

100. Let us now look at the penultimate paragraph of the annex to the memorandum. The proposed amendment provides: "A point of order may relate only to such questions as lie within the competence of the President (Chairman)." This merely states an elementary principle of parliamentary procedure. It contains nothing new, nothing revolutionary. It states a principle which we all recognize as valid but which we all know is more honoured in the breach than in the observance. How often has a point of order been used as a pretext for attempts to reopen a debate, for speeches completely unrelated to the matter under discussion, and for political disquisitions intended for domestic consumption. This is what the amendment, which states simply and concisely that a point of order may relate only to such questions as lie within the competence of the President, seeks to avoid. Points of order are limited solely to these questions.

101. Lastly, paragraph 6 of the annex to the memorandum includes a provision which is not really an amendment but a recognition of the fact that, whether or not we agree with the establishment of that body, since the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee has been established as a committee of the General Assembly, its Chairman should have the right to be a member of the General Committee. Apart from the insertion of a clause beginning with the words "No two members of the General Committee"—which is a drafting change but does not affect the substance—the only innovation is that it is pointed out that the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee is a member of the General Committee. A reference to rule 38 as it now stands will show that this is the only change.

102. To sum up, the Ecuadorean delegation considers that the right of every delegation to give due expression to its views is in no way affected by the proposed amendments.

103. It might be argued, in connexion with paragraph 1, that the President or a representative might move

the closure of the debate prematurely. But it is in order to avoid this that provision is made for a vote, which will express the general opinion of the delegations. And while the President may make such a proposal, any representative may do so also, when he thinks there has been sufficient debate on an item. Let me cite a case in point: at this moment, when it is almost 1 p.m., would there be any harm in the President moving the limitation of the debate after the question has been discussed as we have discussed it, even though there might be four or five speakers anxious to discuss it more fully? Any one of us, or the President, could move this. What this amendment seeks to do is to prevent all sixty delegations from intervening merely to discuss whether or not to limit the debate.

104. Mr. KYROU (Greece): I respectfully submit that by lengthy speeches during this discussion we shall certainly not contribute to the idea of limiting the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly. I shall be very brief.

105. My delegation has carefully studied the memorandum of the Secretary-General now before the General Assembly. The Secretary-General, as well as his executive assistants acting on his behalf, proceeded in an extremely cautious and, at the same time, sound and wise way with respect to this question. In my capacity as permanent representative of my country to the United Nations, I have had the occasion to follow to a certain extent the compiling of the suggestions of the Secretary-General. I am happy to state that my Government fully agrees with all of them.

106. I take it that the wish of the meeting will be to refer the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure to the Sixth Committee. My delegation will take the occasion in that Committee to support these amendments. We also support all the other suggestions.

107. We are particularly in favour of the idea of setting up an *ad hoc* committee between the sessions of the General Assembly on which all the Members of the United Nations would be represented. This committee could take up the items which were postponed from the preceding session of the General Assembly for lack of time or for other reasons.

108. On more general grounds, nobody can even think of denying that the corner-stone of the General Assembly and of the United Nations as a whole is, and must always remain, complete freedom of speech to all delegations. We feel that the best way of ensuring and enforcing this principle is to organize our rules of procedure in a more stable and better way. Just as a good government with laws which are commonly respected guarantees the freedom of its citizens, we feel that good rules of procedure will best guarantee freedom of speech in the General Assembly.

109. Mr. VAN LYNDEN (Netherlands): The delegation of the Netherlands has always favoured the promotion of a sober and expeditious conduct of business in all organs of the United Nations. If this is imperative in any organ in particular, it certainly is in the yearly sessions of the General Assembly.

110. The United Nations was one of the first international organizations to be established after the Second World War. As early as the San Francisco Con-

ference, in 1945, the practice was adopted for many countries to send to conferences many outstanding members of their government—from their parliaments, their universities and their trade unions. Soon, however, in many parts of the world and in particular in Western Europe, many other international conferences and organizations emerged, and the practice to which I referred was applied as well to many of those gatherings. Today, therefore, the burden placed on the shoulders of many cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and others outside the staff of the permanent delegations is such that, more than ever, there is need to consider whether we cannot reduce that burden by shortening our meetings.

111. Although this is not the first time that "measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly" have been proposed, my delegation welcomed the initiative taken during the latter part of the sixth session of the General Assembly by a number of delegations, under the leadership of Norway, to formulate proposals to that end. These proposals are now before us in a study prepared by the Secretary-General after consultation with the various delegations. We see reflected in them several suggestions which we submitted in response to the Secretary-General's circular of 1 August 1952.

112. In spite of my introductory remarks, let me say at once that we do not have exaggerated hopes for the results of these proposals. The basic issue is, of course, the necessity for self-restraint by delegations and individual representatives. We can appeal to their self-restraint but we cannot enforce it.

113. There are five groups of suggestions and proposals in the Secretary-General's paper to which I should like to refer. First, there are the suggestions about the agenda. We are in favour of those suggestions, especially the recommendation that, only when explicitly requested, should reports be placed on the provisional agenda. Moreover, to these recommendations, we should like to add here, as we have already stated in our written reply to the Secretary-General, the suggestion that recurring items should not be automatically placed on the agenda every year but that some of them should be considered one year and some the next; in other words, to discuss such items once every two years instead of yearly.

114. Secondly, there is a group of suggestions about the conduct of business in the Main Committees and, to a more limited extent, in the plenary meetings. Of these, we expect little practical results, but they might have some effect. We, for our part, should like to stress the advisability of the more frequent application of a time limit for speeches and more rigid adherence to the rules of procedure applying to points of order. We welcome the definition of a point of order to be added to rules 72 and 112 respectively. Furthermore, we should like the officials of the Secretariat who assist the chairmen of committees to pay particular heed to those suggestions. The understandable lack of experience of new chairmen should be met, as I must add it is being met in many cases, by the expert advice of the secretaries of the committees.

115. Thirdly, there is a question of inter-sessional *ad hoc* committees consisting of representatives of all sixty members. My delegation does not welcome this idea.

We feel that it might have the reverse effect, of spreading out the work of the Assembly over a whole year. Moreover, such a committee or committees might overlap and tend to encroach upon the competency of the Councils and already existing commissions and committees.

116. Fourthly, there is the suggestion to have five committees meet simultaneously instead of four. In theory, this would undoubtedly speed up our work. We doubt, however, whether this practice would make very much difference. Scheduled meetings are often postponed now because delegations are not sufficiently prepared. Furthermore, for small delegations—and here I mean delegations smaller than that of my own country—such stepped-up programmes of meetings might prove impossible to follow.

117. Finally, there is the suggestion to fix a later opening date. We are in favour of this idea because we do think that, combined with the well-known yearning even of politicians and scholars to spend Christmas at home with their families, it might have the result of shortening the duration of the session.

118. Having made these several remarks, I shall not at present make any detailed statement on the proposed alterations of the relevant paragraphs of our rules of procedure. I would point out, however, that in view of our observations on these suggestions with respect to an inter-sessional *ad hoc* committee or committees, we reserve our position in respect of the last sentence of the proposed new text for rule 38.

119. Mr. DAYAL (India): I shall be very brief. My delegation has with care studied the suggestions of the Secretary-General on the ways of shortening the duration of the session of the General Assembly. The length of the recent sessions, no doubt, has imposed a considerable burden, financial and otherwise, on the resources of many delegations. But any proposals for reducing this burden need to be carefully considered. It is evident that this reduction must be effected by improving the methods and procedures of the General Assembly and not by curtailing the rights of delegations both to submit items and to have them promptly and fully discussed.

120. As the Secretary-General has himself pointed out, the best interests of the General Assembly—not the length of its sessions as such—must remain the overriding consideration. The comprehensive discussion of international problems is perhaps the primary and most important of the General Assembly's functions. It is for this reason that many Members feel, as the memorandum itself points out, that any measures to limit the length and number of speeches would strike at the very foundations of the General Assembly's functions in the Organization and at the rights of its Members. Among the suggestions made in the memorandum is the establishment of an *ad hoc* inter-sessional committee. If such a committee is intended merely to make recommendations for the consideration of the following session of the General Assembly, certain Member States may have grounds for apprehension that issues of major importance to them may be postponed by relegation to this committee and thereby to another session. Furthermore, unless all Member States are convinced of the proposed committee's

usefulness and co-operate in its work, its establishment may do more harm than good.

121. In view of the complexity of the administrative and procedural problems raised in the memorandum which is before us, my delegation feels that this plenary meeting of the General Assembly is not, perhaps, the best place to give detailed consideration to them. It would, in our view, be advantageous for the General Assembly to have before it the considered views of a small body of experts on the whole subject. By "experts", we have in mind those who have held the office of President of the General Assembly in the past and also those who have presided over the Sixth Committee. A committee composed of five or six such persons, assisted by the Secretary-General and, perhaps, also the Assistant Secretary-General in charge of Confer-

ence and General Services, would, in our view, be able to give us some very valuable ideas and proposals. These proposals could then be considered by this General Assembly. We hope the experts will be able to present their recommendations before the end of the present session. But if not, we could even wait for the eighth session to consider the matter further. We suggest that it should be left to the President to convene such a committee under his own chairmanship. Reference of the Secretary-General's memorandum to a committee, moreover, would be in keeping with rule 162 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. We hope, therefore, that the General Assembly will, for the reasons which I have given, give its consideration to the suggestions which I have made.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.